PITTA

Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
New Series Volume 21 Number 6 June 2024

FIELD TRIP: Sunday, June 23, 2024, 6.00AM: Nehru Zoological Park, Hyderabad. Meeting Point(s): Golden Palace Restaurant, Attapur, 05:30AM; Administrative Block entrance, 06:00AM. Trip Coordinator(s): Mohd Adnan Uddin (Mobile: 95337-01702)

Nehru Zoological Park always makes for a rich birding experience with the adjacent green corridor of the National Police Academy and Mir Alam Tank. So please come and enjoy a Sunday outing. The natural habitats in the zoo support species like Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, Black-rumped Flameback, Spotted Owlet, Yellow Bittern, Painted Stork, Shikra, Purple Heron, Grey Heron, Grey-bellied Cuckoo, Indian Grey Hornbill and many more.

This will be a half-day trip, so carry adequate water and breakfast/snacks, and protective gear if required. Covid protocols will be followed; please ensure you wear masks, carry a sanitiser and maintain social distancing. Non-members are most welcome; however, they are requested to contribute Rs. 100/- per person to the Deccan Birders kitty. New Deccan Birders hats and caps will be available for purchase; please carry adequate cash.

The Delectation Of Window Birding

Text and Photos: Syed Murthuza Hussaini

Indian Peafowl

I work at Focus High School, which is conveniently situated near Salar Jung Museum's backyard, the part which is not open to the public and where its flora is at its healthiest. There is a lot of shrubbery and a good mix of large and mid-sized trees covering a long stretch bordering the Museum, which itself is in proximity with the Musi river and its ecosystem, and only a stretch of road separates both. The front of the school looks at a dilapidated government property. The long years of neglect were to the advantage of nature and gave rise to abundant vegetation. And till very recently, our school ground had, amongst other small trees, a large banyan tree, which very sadly got uprooted a short while ago due to high gale and winds.

To my utter advantage, the school has large glass paned windows on all sides. It was designed to allow natural lighting. This in turn provides a very convenient all-round view of trees, which attract a host of urban birds, and this my friends, is how I indulge in the delight of window birding.

It was back in 2021 that I was first introduced to the pleasure of bird watching by my dearest friend and colleague Asif Arastu, who himself is an avid bird watcher and photographer. One day I went on a birding trip to Ameenpur Lake with him.

“Listen carefully, do you hear the sound like snipping scissors? It's a Zitting Cisticola,” Asif said. Then we approached the lake and he pointed out the various water birds: Cormorants, Herons, Egrets, Ibises, Moorhens, Jacanas and so on.

That day, something changed in me. From that day onwards, I suddenly became aware of the presence of birds all around me. After this, whenever I went out and looked at trees, poles, or electric wires, I could see birds; in fact I was actively seeking them.

One day I was standing in our school grounds and I was hearing this rhythmic, metronome-like sound coming from the top of the banyan tree. It was a familiar sound that I was aware of but could not place it and till now never paid attention to. It was like listening to a very old friend, it's just that I acknowledged its existence today.

I have been hearing this sound all my life. When we were children and running around in the courtyards, this sound was our constant companion. Getting overwhelmed, I called Asif and described to him the sound I heard and he told me that it's a Coppersmith Barbet. The name sounded exotic so I searched for the bird online.

The picture I saw took my breath away. Before that, for me, the birds were the usual crows, pigeons, parrots, eagles, sparrows etc. I could never comprehend that such a beautiful bird lived in our vicinity, so close, yet so far that I never saw it. From that day, I actively started watching the tree tops from my third floor office window and one fine day I saw it.

Coppersmith Barbet

What an exhilarating experience that was, watching the little guy actively pumping its lungs with each note, what precision and what plethora of colours!

In later days, other familiar sounds were traced to a Greater (now Southern) Coucal, then a Tailorbird and then the Sunbird and so on.

Purple-rumped Sunbird male

Today my day starts with the familiar sounds of the Barbets, Tailorbirds, Sunbirds, Koels, and Babblers.

Large Grey Babbler

Asian Koel female

Later in the morning comes the White-throated Kingfisher, trilling sharply and making such a commotion, and perching on his favourite branch, comically looking left and right with its oversized beak.

White-throated Kingfisher

Tickell's Blue Flycatcher

Later we are greeted by the melodious Tickell's Blue Flycatcher and in the afternoon a Grey Hornbill may pay its obeisance by making shrieking calls.

Indian Grey Hornbill

I don't know for how long this joy of mine may last. Our landscapes are changing. The big banyan tree which was a host to the first Coppersmith Barbet that I saw, and hundreds of other birds, is no more. It was already destined for destruction, as the land it was standing on is marked for road widening by the Hyderabad Metro, and the only satisfaction is that it gracefully accepted its fate at the hands of nature and not the axe.

But I am hopeful that my ten years old daughter Marzia is showing a keen interest in birds. Whenever she sees a bird, she comes running back to me with the description and demands an identification. Also, I still have so many trees around and I will continue to watch birds from my windows.

Spotted Dove

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BIRDWATCHING AT GOA
Report: October 6-8, 2023

Text & Photos: Aditya Rao

Mixed flock of Greater & Lesser Sand Plovers, Gull-billed Terns, Sanderlings and Great Knots at Goa

Goa is a well-known go-to tourist hub, known especially for its wonderful beaches and as a big family getaway. It is not a big secret either that Goa is bestowed with one of the most diverse environments, with beaches, estuaries, mudflats & fantastic forests of the Western Ghats hosting a great diversity of avian fauna. Goa is especially good for birding during the months of October to March, when a plethora of birds come there for wintering. Also, early April could be very good to observe some birds in their breeding plumage.

Flock of Gull-billed Terns and Greater & Lesser Crested Terns

When birding in Goa, one would need to travel between South and North Goa districts to cover both the seashore and the amazing forests.

As always, my birding trip was planned post a business trip when I had a little over two days (weekend) to spare. I was guided by a well-known naturalist, Omkar, who is not only a very good birder but also has deep knowledge of the Goa ecology in general, making it a pleasure to travel with him. My travel was also during early October; in hindsight, if you are planning to travel to Goa for birding, it is recommended that you start mid-November or later, so that you can witness some additional migrants, especially the kingfishers and other shorebirds.

Day-1 (Oct 6, 2023): Agacaim Mudflats and Mahavir National Park

Since we were staying close to Panjim, we decided to start with Agacaim Mudflats. It is an estuary in North Goa formed by the Zuari River meeting the Arabian Sea, creating a fantastic ecology of both freshwater, sea and terrestrial avifauna. Given that it is a mudflat ending into a sandy beach with water everywhere, we quickly realized that it is best for gumboots, floaters or even barefoot (recommended if you are comfortable).

We also realized that given the sheer distances, a spotting scope is highly recommended. Of course, you can make do with a good pair of binoculars, but 10x may not be enough to identify birds at a distance.

Greater & Lesser Sand Plovers and Sanderlings

Sanderling

As we got into the mudflats, we immediately saw a large flock of small waders running with the waves; they mainly included Lesser and Greater Sand Plovers along with Sanderlings, Dunlins, Little Ringed Plovers and a few Terek Sandpipers.

Pied Avocet

As we started walking along the mudflats, we realized that this going to be a treasure trove of birds. To our very pleasant surprise, we were greeted by a lone Pied Avocet, which is rather rare in this part of India.

White-bellied Sea Eagle

Further along we several White-bellied Sea Eagles hovering for a possible scrap or opportunity. Also we noticed several common Egrets, like Great and Little Egrets, busy hunting near the edge of the tide.

Great Egret

Broad-billed Sandpiper

Lesser Sand Plover, Broad-billed Sandpiper and Great Knot

On closer observation (through the spotting scope) of several large flocks roosting on the sandy beach, we realized that it is a complicated mixed flock and, on patient scanning, were able to spot the Broad-billed Sandpiper and Great Knot, rare sightings for the season. Of course majority of the birds were in their non-breeding plumage, making them blend into each other, making it especially difficult to isolate the rare ones.

Common Tern

Gull-billed Tern

Little Tern

On the beachside we also noticed several other terrestrial birds like Blue-tailed Bee-eaters in very large numbers. We also saw a few White and Grey Wagtails, indicating the arrival of winter migrants. It was interesting to also observe several herons like the Black-crowned Night Herons roosting on the trees.

Birding around the shores and mudflats of Goa can be very productive. Since the monsoons had just receded, it was very humid and sultry unfortunately.

Greater Crested Tern juvenile (L) and adult (M & R)

We also observed several terns that included the Common, Little, Greater & Lesser Crested and Gull-billed Terns.

A coastal view at Goa

So, around 11:00AM, and we decided to grab some brunch and head over to Bhagwan Mahavir National Park for some forest birding.

Crimson-backed Sunbird

Loten's Sunbird

Unfortunately, given the temperatures, the activity was rather sedate – of course Crimson-backed, Purple and Loten's Sunbirds were rather busy visiting any available flower, given their energy needs and metabolism.

Little Spiderhunter

We also spotted a few Little Spiderhunters around Banana plantations, especially feeding on the inflorescence.

Day-2 (Oct 7, 2023): Bondla WLS & Bhagwan Mahavir National Park

The entrance to Bondla WLS

Day-2 was scheduled to be a forest birding day around two locations in South Goa – Bhagwan Mahavir National Park and Bondla WLS.

Given that the monsoon had just passed (although, I was told it was not a great monsoon this time), it was a very thick green cover, making it very hard to spot birds, and the migration season had not started either.

Tambdi Surla Mahadev Temple, a wonderful area with lots of bird activity

Malabar Trogon male

Malabar Woodshrike

Malabar Pied Hornbill

We did get great sightings of the residents, although they were far apart. Some important sightings included the Malabar Trogon, Malabar Woodshrike, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Malabar Grey Hornbill, Malabar Barbet, Malabar Parakeet, Flame-throated Bulbul and Yellow-browed Bulbul.

Malabar Barbet

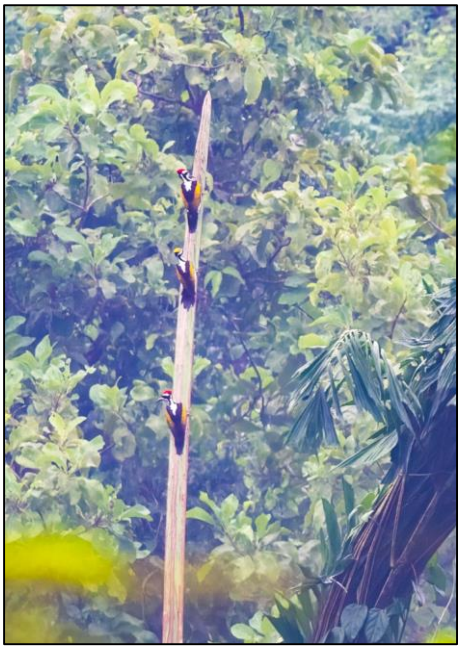
Malabar Parakeet

Flame-throated Bulbul

Malabar Flameback

We also spotted several resident woodpeckers like Black-rumped Flameback, White-naped Woodpecker, Malabar Flameback (split from the Greater Flameback), Rufous Woodpecker, Speckled Piculet and the Heart-spotted Woodpecker – most of them endemic to the forests of the Western Ghats.

Speckled Piculet



White-naped Woodpecker

Heart-spotted Woodpecker

We also regularly spotted several Nilgiri Flowerpeckers around the flowering and fruiting trees.

Nilgiri Flowerpecker

Small streams and rivers make for great birding sites in the forests of Goa

Unfortunately, it is common to see road kills, we saw a Green Vine Snake slithering and struggling on the road; we lifted it up and put it back away from the road.

Green Vine Snake

Given the time of the year we could not spot Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher, Blue-eared Kingfisher and the Black-capped Kingfisher which are otherwise found regularly in these forest streams later in winter.

Day-3 (Oct 8, 2023): Agacaim Mudflats

On the final day, we returned to the Mudflats to continue our search for some birds we had missed on Day-1, and we were not disappointed.

Bar-tailed Godwit

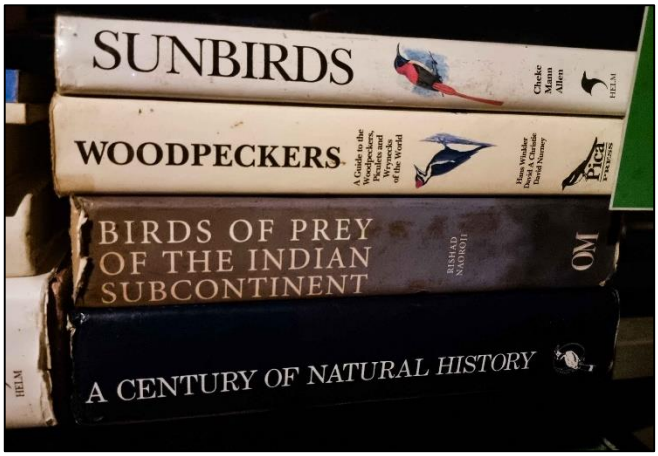
Black-tailed Godwit

Ruddy Turnstone

On this particular day, though we started a little late due to the travel, we spotted Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwits, Whimbrels, Curlew Sandpipers and Ruddy Turnstones, and also spotted the Broad-billed Sandpiper and the Great Knot in the mixed flock. We continued to see extremely large flocks of Sandpipers and Terns all through the mudflats.

Caspian Tern

The place we stayed at in South Goa amid the forest had a host of books in its library. I was super inspired and ordered some of these great hardbound books!



Some of the books at the eco-resort

To sum up, it was an enthralling birding experience indeed. Except for the monsoon season, it is generally very productive to bird in Goa, though I would strongly recommend later part of winter from December to February for the best experience.

The full list of birds seen during the trip:

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
1	Lesser Whistling-duck	*Dendrocygna javanica*	13	Little Swift	*Apus affinis*
2	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*	14	Asian Palm Swift	*Cypsiurus balasiensis*
3	Grey Junglefowl	*Gallus sonneratii*	15	Pied Avocet	*Recurvirostra avosetta*
4	Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*	16	Pacific Golden Plover	*Pluvialis fulva*
5	Spotted Dove	*Spilopelia chinensis*	17	Little Ringed Plover	*Charadrius dubius*
6	Asian Emerald Dove	*Chalcophaps indica*	18	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*
7	Grey-fronted Green Pigeon	*Treron affinis*	19	Tibetan Sand Plover	*Anarhynchus atrifrons*
8	Malabar Imperial Pigeon	*Ducula cuprea*	20	Greater Sand Plover	*Anarhynchus leschenaultii*
9	Greater Coucal	*Centropus sinensis*	21	Kentish Plover	*Anarhynchus alexandrinus*
10	Blue-faced Malkoha	*Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*	22	Whimbrel	*Numenius phaeopus*
11	Asian Koel	*Eudynamys scolopaceus*	23	Eurasian Curlew	*Numenius arquata*
12	Common Hawk Cuckoo	*Hierococcyx varius*	24	Bar-tailed Godwit	*Limosa lapponica*

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
25	Black-tailed Godwit	*Limosa limosa*	71	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*
26	Terek Sandpiper	*Xenus cinereus*	72	Asian Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*
27	Common Sandpiper	*Actitis hypoleucos*	73	Blue-tailed Bee-eater	*Merops philippinus*
28	Common Redshank	*Tringa totanus*	74	Chestnut-headed Bee-eater	*Merops leschenaulti*
29	Common Greenshank	*Tringa nebularia*	75	Malabar Barbet	*Psilopogon malabaricus*
30	Ruddy Turnstone	*Arenaria interpres*	76	Brown-headed Barbet	*Psilopogon zeylanicus*
31	Great Knot	*Calidris tenuirostris*	77	White-cheeked Barbet	*Psilopogon viridis*
32	Broad-billed Sandpiper	*Calidris falcinellus*	78	Speckled Piculet	*Picumnus innominatus*
33	Curlew Sandpiper	*Calidris ferruginea*	79	Heart-spotted Woodpecker	*Hemicircus canente*
34	Temminck's Stint	*Calidris temminckii*	80	Malabar Flameback	*Chrysocolaptes socialis*
35	Sanderling	*Calidris alba*	81	White-naped Woodpecker	*Chrysocolaptes festivus*
36	Dunlin	*Calidris alpina*	82	Rufous Woodpecker	*Micropternus brachyurus*
37	Little Stint	*Calidris minuta*	83	Black-rumped Flameback	*Dinopium benghalense*
38	Little Tern	*Sternula albifrons*	84	Plum-headed Parakeet	*Psittacula cyanocephala*
39	Gull-billed Tern	*Gelochelidon nilotica*	85	Malabar Parakeet	*Psittacula columboides*
40	Caspian Tern	*Hydroprogne caspia*	86	Vernal Hanging Parrot	*Loriculus vernalis*
41	Common Tern	*Sterna hirundo*	87	Small Minivet	*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*
42	Lesser Crested Tern	*Thalasseus bengalensis*	88	Orange Minivet	*Pericrocotus flammeus*
43	Great Crested Tern	*Thalasseus bergii*	89	Indian Golden Oriole	*Oriolus kundoo*
44	Lesser Adjutant	*Leptoptilos javanicus*	90	Black-hooded Oriole	*Oriolus xanthornus*
45	Oriental Darter	*Anhinga melanogaster*	91	Malabar Woodshrike	*Tephrodornis sylvicola*
46	Little Cormorant	*Microcarbo niger*	92	Common Woodshrike	*Tephrodornis pondicerianus*
47	Indian Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*	93	Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike	*Hemipus picatus*
48	Black-crowned Night Heron	*Nycticorax nycticorax*	94	Common Iora	*Aegithina tiphia*
49	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*	95	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*
50	Western Reef Egret	*Egretta gularis*	96	Ashy Drongo	*Dicrurus leucophaeus*
51	Striated Heron	*Butorides striata*	97	Bronzed Drongo	*Dicrurus aeneus*
52	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola greyii*	98	Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	*Dicrurus paradiseus*
53	Eastern Cattle Egret	*Bubulcus coromandus*	99	Black-naped Monarch	*Hypothymis azurea*
54	Great Egret	*Ardea alba*	100	Brown Shrike	*Lanius cristatus*
55	Medium Egret	*Ardea intermedia*	101	Long-tailed Shrike	*Lanius schach*
56	Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*	102	Rufous Treepie	*Dendrocitta vagabunda*
57	Purple Heron	*Ardea purpurea*	103	House Crow	*Corvus splendens*
58	Glossy Ibis	*Plegadis falcinellus*	104	Large-billed Crow	*Corvus macrorhynchos*
59	Black-headed Ibis	*Threskiornis melanocephalus*	105	Indian Yellow Tit	*Machlolophus aplonotus*
60	Oriental Honey-buzzard	*Pernis ptilorhynchus*	106	Common Tailorbird	*Orthotomus sutorius*
61	Greater Spotted Eagle	*Clanga clanga*	107	Grey-breasted Prinia	*Prinia hodgsonii*
62	Booted Eagle	*Hieraaetus pennatus*	108	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*
63	Shikra	*Accipiter badius*	109	Zitting Cisticola	*Cisticola juncidis*
64	Black Kite	*Milvus migrans*	110	Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*
65	Brahminy Kite	*Haliastur indus*	111	Wire-tailed Swallow	*Hirundo smithii*
66	White-bellied Sea Eagle	*Icthyophaga leucogaster*	112	Red-rumped Swallow	*Cecropis daurica*
67	Malabar Trogon	*Harpactes fasciatus*	113	Yellow-browed Bulbul	*Acritillas indica*
68	Malabar Grey Hornbill	*Ocyceros griseus*	114	Grey-headed Bulbul	*Microtarsus priocephalus*
69	Malabar Pied Hornbill	*Anthracoceros coronatus*	115	Flame-throated Bulbul	*Rubigula gularis*
70	Common Kingfisher	*Alcedo atthis*	116	White-browed Bulbul	*Pycnonotus luteolus*

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
117	Red-whiskered Bulbul	*Pycnonotus jocosus*	137	Siberian Stonechat	*Saxicola maurus*
118	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*	138	Nilgiri Flowerpecker	*Dicaeum concolor*
119	Green Warbler	*Phylloscopus nitidus*	139	Purple-rumped Sunbird	*Leptocoma zeylonica*
120	Greenish Warbler	*Phylloscopus trochiloides*	140	Crimson-backed Sunbird	*Leptocoma minima*
121	Large-billed Leaf Warbler	*Phylloscopus magnirostris*	141	Purple Sunbird	*Cinnyris asiaticus*
122	Dark-fronted Babbler	*Dumetia atriceps*	142	Loten's Sunbird	*Cinnyris lotenius*
123	Indian Scimitar Babbler	*Pomatorhinus horsfieldii*	143	Little Spiderhunter	*Arachnothera longirostra*
124	Puff-throated Babbler	*Pellorneum ruficeps*	144	Asian Fairy Bluebird	*Irena puella*
125	Brown-cheeked Fulvetta	*Alcippe poioicephala*	145	Jerdon's Leafbird	*Chloropsis jerdoni*
126	Jungle Babbler	*Argya striata*	146	Golden-fronted Leafbird	*Chloropsis aurifrons*
127	Velvet-fronted Nuthatch	*Sitta frontalis*	147	Black-throated Munia	*Lonchura kelaarti*
128	Brahminy Starling	*Sturnia pagodarum*	148	White-rumped Munia	*Lonchura striata*
129	Malabar Starling	*Sturnia blythii*	149	House Sparrow	*Passer domesticus*
130	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*	150	Forest Wagtail	*Dendronanthus indicus*
131	Jungle Myna	*Acridotheres fuscus*	151	Grey Wagtail	*Motacilla cinerea*
132	Asian Brown Flycatcher	*Muscicapa dauurica*	152	Western Yellow Wagtail	*Motacilla flava*
133	Brown-breasted Flycatcher	*Muscicapa muttui*	153	White-browed Wagtail	*Motacilla maderaspatensis*
134	Oriental Magpie Robin	*Copsychus saularis*	154	White Wagtail	*Motacilla alba*
135	White-rumped Shama	*Copsychus malabaricus*	155	Blyth's Pipit	*Anthus godlewskii*
136	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	*Cyornis tickelliae*			

Some other photos taken during this trip:

Dark-fronted Babbler

Dunlin

Blyth's Pipit

Western Reef Egret

Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike

Greater Racket-tailed Drongo

White-rumped Shama

Terek Sandpiper

Tickell'sBlue Flycatcher

Indian Yellow Tit

Purple-rumped Sunbird male

Temminck's Stint

Common Greenshank

Crimson-backed Sunbird

Taiga Flycatcher

Red-whiskered Bulbul

Little Spiderhunter

Greater Crested Tern juvenile

Great Knot resting along with Lesser Sand Plovers

Common Hawk Cuckoo

Black-hooded Oriole

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Bird of the Month

Text and Photos: Umesh Mani

White-throated Fantail (*Rhipidura albicollis*)

White-throated Fantail (Sattal, Uttarakhand, May 12, 2024)

Order: Passeriformes
Family: Rhipiduridae
Genus: *Rhipidura*
Species: *R. albicollis*
Size: 19 cm

Description & distribution: The White-throated Fantail is a small passerine that is widely distributed across tropical southern Asia, through the Indian Himalayas east through Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Malaysia upto Indonesia. It is mainly slate-grey on the upperparts and underparts, with a black eye mask and white throat and short white supercilium. The tail is distinctive and an easy identification feature – a shade darker than the body, fan-shaped and edged with white tips to all feathers except the central pair. Iris is brown, and bill and legs are black. The sexes are alike. Juvenile is like the adult, but with lesser white on the face and brownish edges to the dark body feathers. 9 sub-species are recognized, with considerable variation between them in terms of plumage colour. Besides these, the White-spotted Fantail (*R. albogularis*) was also, until recently, considered a sub-species of the White-throated Fantail.

Habitat & behaviour: The White-throated Fantail is usually seen singly or in pairs, in a variety of wooded habitats like broadleaf evergreen forest (especially at higher elevations), pine forest, deciduous forest, scrub, cultivated areas, parks and gardens. Like most small birds, it is fast-moving and hyperactive, flicking or fanning its tail as it moves. It is insectivorous and feeds on a variety of small flying insects, sometimes through aerial sorties, but mainly by foraging along the forest floor or through lower, middle (and occasionally upper) storeys of undergrowth. It is often seen along with mixed-species foraging flocks. It utters a harsh contact call *chuk chuk*; the clear, whistling song is melodious, consisting of several tinkling notes repeated as the bird prances about. It uses the same song year after year with a few minor changes, with the result that the song can sound quite different after 4-5 years.

Nesting: The White-throated Fantail breeds between March and August. The neat cup-shaped nest is made of moss, fine grass, shredded leaves and fibres, plastered outside with cobwebs, and usually built in a fork or junction of twigs or branches, within 3 metres from the ground. The usual clutch consists of 3 pinkish cream eggs with a ring of small brown specks around the broad end. Incubation duties are shared by both parents.

Local name: The White-throated Fantail is known as *'Machharya'* or *'Chakdil'* in Hindi, *'Chitta gal nacha'* in Punjabi, *'Tapkili nayan'* in Gujarati, *'Nachan'* or *'Nachra'* in Marathi, and *'Dasari pitta'* in Telugu.

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